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The Social Democratic Challenge

by Leszek Kolakowski

A Response to Conservatism

by Sidney Hook

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The Social Democratic Challenge

By Leszek Kolakowski

This article is adapted from Professor Kolakowski's keynote address to the national convention of Social Democrats, USA.

Leszek Kolakowski has a long record of devotion to the cause of truth and the struggle for freedom. In 1956, in articles and speeches, he voiced the protests of intellectuals and workers against the Communist dictatorship in Poland, going so far as to pin to the bulletin board at Warsaw University forty-eight theses calling for democratic reform of the country. Thereafter he became the leading spokesman for the school of thought known as revisionism, which looked toward the democratic transformation of communism. During the Polish crisis of 1968, Communist Party chief Gomulka referred to Professor Kolakowski as the "spiritual father" of the student unrest. The Communist Party, charging that he had turned his chair at Warsaw University into a "center for political opposition," took away his professorship and forced him to leave the country. Since then he has taught at Berkeley and Yale, and he is now at Oxford.

To say that all over the world social democracy is not just a political lobby voicing the aspirations and grievances of workers, of underdogs and the oppressed, but an idea of a better human community as well is neither controversial nor very enlightening. The trouble with the social-democratic idea is that it does not stock or sell any of the exciting ideological commodities which totalitarian movements—communist, fascist, or leftist—offer dream-hungry youth.

It has no ultimate solution for all human misfortune; it has no prescription for the total salvation of mankind; it cannot promise the firework of the final revolution to settle definitively all the conflict and struggles; it has invented no miraculous devices to bring about the perfect unity of men or universal brotherhood; it believes in no final, easy victory over evil. It is not fun; it is difficult and unrewarding, and it does not suffer from self-inflicted blindness.

It requires the commitment to a number of basic values—freedom, equal opportunity, a human-oriented and publicly supervised economy—and it demands hard knowledge and rational calculation, as we need to be aware of, and to investigate as deeply as possible, the historical and economic conditions in which these values are to be implemented. It has an obstinate will to erode by inches the conditions which produce avoidable suffering, oppression,

hunger, wars, racial and national hatred, insatiable greed and vindictive envy, yet it is aware of the narrow limits within which this struggle is being waged, limits imposed by the natural framework of human existence, by innumerable historical accidents, and by various forces that have shaped for centuries today's social institutions.

The social-democratic idea admits the inescapable truth that many of the values it honors limit each other and can be implemented only through compromises, often painful and awkward. All the institutions of welfare and social security, all the organs of economic planning, all the social instruments for the more rational use of land and natural resources, for preventing waste and pollution, can be built only at the price of a growing state bureaucracy and of restrictions imposed on the autonomy of smaller economic and regional units. Nobody knows how this price can be avoided; but the outcry against big government heard all over the democratic world proves that the price is heavy. Yet social democracy is ready to uphold both ideas—planning and autonomy—and it is right; it is right as long as it keeps unceasingly in mind that these two principles run counter to each other and in no conceivable society will they be implemented fully. Therefore it must not promise measures which are supposed to bring simultaneously the efficiency of high centralization and the freedom of decentralization.

Similar clashes are clearly unavoidable in most of the values we cherish. Much as we might be appalled at the sight of man-made natural disasters which endanger both the human future and the existence of birds, fish, and trees, we must not forget that ecological slogans alone, isolated from the complexity of modern life, can as little contribute to rational proposals for economic organization and political reforms as can the idea of economic growth as the supreme or exclusive objective. Zero pollution is obviously impossible without the utter destruction of civilization and thereby of most of the human race since its survival depends largely on industry. Pollution is a matter of a rational reckoning of risks, of gains and losses. Granted that we have to worry about man's survival in the first place and about the whales only in the second: the nature-worship ideology is incapable of taking up the challenge of the modern economy. On the other hand ecological slogans may be, and are

in fact, exploited to manipulate people for various political purposes which only marginally have something to do with the welfare of butterflies, let alone of people.

Among the values included in the social democratic idea, even the value of majority rule cannot be accepted as an absolute principle. It must be restricted by the principle of the inalienable rights of individuals, which no majority verdict may abrogate. The concept of democracy would be a parody of itself if it implied that anything endorsed by a majority were acceptable—that, for instance, 51 percent of a population is acting democratically if it decides to massacre the remaining 49 percent. If we accepted the principle of unconditional majority rule as the sufficient mark of democracy, Hitler's rule in Germany, which for a period clearly enjoyed the support of the majority, would appear as a model democracy, as would all the populist or quasi-populist dictatorships which once made claims to represent the majority and then represented it axiomatically and indefinitely because its critics were slaughtered or silenced. We have to admit that the principle of majority rule must be constrained by the principle of individual rights which no majority may infringe upon and that the human rights' concept is valid irrespective of the majority's decrees.

**"Mendacity is not an
accidental blemish on
the body of Communism."**

The value of freedom has to be seen as the core of the social-democratic idea simply because without it all other values are empty and inefficient. Put another way: social democracy defends freedom both because it is a value in itself, the most precious treasure of life, and because it is the condition within which most of the other things it defends can flourish. There is no point in talking about equality in the absence of freedom, for one of the most important goods in today's world is the free access to information and the participation in power, both of which are denied to a majority in despotic systems, totalitarian or not. Therefore it is sheer absurdity to say, for instance, that in Cuba or China "people have less freedom, yet more equality": they have none, quite apart from the distribution of welfare and the access to scarce material goods. And, fortunately for us, civil liberties are the necessary condition of productive efficiency; slavery is economically efficient only during the earliest stages of technical development, and political slavery is an enormous obstacle to productivity.

It is both commonsensically true and abundantly proven by the experience of communist states that a political system operating with built-in information barriers, burdened with an obsessive secretiveness, using the criterion of political servility in promoting managerial cadres, and not having to respond to the needs and wishes of the population except under the threat of desperate revolts, is bound to be chronically sick in terms of the production of wealth. Having concentrated an enormous power without responsibility—an accumulation of power exceeding anything known in history—the ruling class, by virtue of its very position, generates permanent mismanagement and huge waste, and the attempts to set up the all-encompassing planning system end fatefully in all-pervading chaos. The working class, adulated in slogans and kept quiet by the police machinery, has neither power nor moral or economic reasons to help the ailing economy; as the political and economic power of the communist exploiting class support each other, so do the political and economic enslavement of the working society. The economic advantage this society enjoys consists in its being able to keep its failures, or some of them, a secret by producing false statistics or none at all. Mendacity is not an accidental blemish on the body of communism: it is the absolute condition of its health, of its life, more so than in non-totalitarian tyrannies. Here is a regime which is supposed to be ruled by, and get its legitimacy from, an ideology with universalist pretensions and with an "ultimate goal"; thus all areas of life and all past and present events must be depicted as elements of the triumphant march towards this goal. A system that wants to leave no domain of human existence, including human memory, out of control, is compelled to apply the huge machinery of the lie to all forms of expression and to give mendacious names to everything it produces.

Still, if it is true that among the values of social democracy freedom is the condition of all others, it is misleading to apply the name "freedom" to anything people need or claim. The scope of freedom is defined as the area within which individuals may make decisions as they wish, unrestricted by law, and though it is obviously the case that the freedom to decide is of no use for those whose choices are anyway determined by the lack of material power, the degree of power is not to be confused with the extent of freedom. Freedom is negatively related to law, not positively to power. For people who cannot afford to travel, freedom of international travel appears of little meaning, to be sure; yet the material ability to travel, important though it might be, does not derive from freedom. There are many justifiable claims which do not derive

from freedom and should not be said to. Much as we are aware of social disasters caused by large scale unemployment—economic waste, criminality, human suffering—the fact is that being employed is a condition enabling people to use their freedom in various ways; it is not itself a freedom. There is no unemployment in concentration camps, and concentration camps do not become the abode of freedom; the compulsory abolishment of unemployment through forced labor hardly deserves to be hailed as a giant step in the fight for freedom. Briefly, there are many well-justified claims which ought not to be confused with each other, as such a deliberate confusion is one of the ideological instruments to glorify oppression and violence.

Another case of conceptual confusion which there is perhaps no need to dwell upon, as it has been repeatedly criticized recently, is the left-right distinction. Certainly, nowadays one hardly finds people who explicitly endorse the Stalinist slogan of old that the measure of "being left" is one's attitude towards the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, these labels are still widely employed without anybody providing us with intelligible criteria of how they are defined, and these labels carry the suggestion that the entire world of political ideas, movements, and regimes forms a continuous spectrum in which every unit may be located according to the amount of "leftist" or "rightist" components it contains. Various states and political movements are quasi-automatically being called "left" (or "Marxist") if they get Soviet weapons; some others are labelled "rightist" once they want to shed the foreign yoke if this yoke happens to be Soviet. One easily notices the persistence of absurd old clichés in journalistic jargon all over the world.

Therefore the question "Which side are you on, left or right?" has to be rejoined by another question: "What do you mean by asking if I am on the left side? Do you ask if I am on the same side as the guardians of Gulag and invaders of Czechoslovakia? If I am on the side of the policemen who two years ago savagely tortured hundreds of Polish workers and a few years earlier slaughtered a still unknown number of dockers in Polish ports in cruel revenge for their protest against increasing poverty? Or do you ask whether I am on the side of those German terrorists who in a hijacked airplane designated all the passengers with Jewish names for slaughter? Or on the side of Cambodian "liberators" who managed to convert the entire country into a concentration camp after murdering all those suspected of being literate?" The answer can only be: "Hell, no, I am not on the same side and I do not care a damn about being called 'left' if this means to applaud or excuse the violence, oppression, tortures, exploitation, and invasions provided only that the hangmen and

the exploiters get their weapons from an anti-American source, this being the unspoken ideological criterion." The conclusion is simple: either the distinction has lost any recognizable sense or it has to be redefined completely and be applied only to movements and attitudes within the democratic segment of the political spectrum with an unequivocal exclusion of all terroristic movements, totalitarian ideologies, police and military regimes, no matter what they call themselves.

There are no such things as reactionary tortures and progressive tortures, left labor camps and right labor camps, censorship for oppression and censorship for liberation. This is the reason why the non-violent anti-totalitarian movements in Soviet-dominated countries go beyond the left-right categories; their claims are based on the human rights idea which cannot possibly be defined in terms borrowed from this anachronistic distinction.

This leads us to the question, often discussed, of double standards in assessing political regimes. The point is not that we should make chimerical claims and demand that political criteria not be applied to political actions; what may be demanded instead is that political criteria not appear under the guise of moral norms. People who define themselves by the so-called left tradition are, as a whole, more guilty of resorting to double standards, not because they are naturally immoral, but because their socially inherited reflexes render them more hypocritical, because they have always employed moralistic language, while in many countries the conservative establishment has pretended much less to be guided by moral ideals and more freely admitted a concern with matters of *realpolitik*, *raison d'état*, and trade.

"There are no such things as reactionary tortures and progressive tortures."

The governments that do business with both Chile and the Soviet Union cannot be accused of using double standards; leftist moralists who demonstrate before the embassies of South Africa and Iran and seem to believe that Vietnam and Albania overflow with democratic virtue appear grotesque. However obvious might be the position of those who display their moral indignation according to their political allegiances, it is true, on the other hand, that our concern with the internal conduct of regimes of various countries is usually prompted by other con-

siderations as well.

The recent record of various military dictatorships in Latin America has been arguably worse than that of European communist states in such essential points as the scale of tortures and government-initiated assassinations. In terms of human rights the assessment is clear enough. Still, a not-negligible difference between Uruguay and the Soviet Union is that the Uruguayan regime, abominable though it might be, poses no threat of world-wide expansion supported by mighty military machinery. We do admit—and I believe it to be a traditional element of the social-democratic approach—that no country in the world may maintain that its political regime, however oppressive, is protected from the eyes of outsiders; no, we are both entitled and duty-bound not to leave the oppressors quiet on the pretense of the non-interference principle. This readiness to behave like importunate meddlers ought to be applied evenly, of course. Yet in the case of the Soviet system, we have additional reasons for our discourteous behavior: unlike the case of Uruguay, South Africa, or for that matter, Albania and Cambodia, the Soviet internal regime is obviously linked with the never-saturated hunger of an imperialist state for new areas of domination. It is clearly essential to keep one's own population in ignorance, fear, and isolation, if one wants to use it as a helpless and inert tool for imperial purposes—if, for instance, one needs soldiers who, as in the case of Czechoslovakia ten years ago, either did not know which country they were in or believed that they had been sent to a Czechoslovakia which had requested aid in the face of an imminent invasion by German fascists. In today's world the Soviet internal regime is probably the most potent single factor likely to trigger off a global war (which does not mean that this is the actual intention of its rulers).

This is why we, people from somewhat exotic Central and East European plains, *do* believe that in exposing and opposing Soviet despotism, we stand up not only for the regional interest of lands forcibly incorporated into a predatory empire as a result of the Yalta agreement, but for a better and safer world order as well. East Europeans are well aware that America has no wonder-making contrivance to force changes on oppressive regimes and to reverse immediately the situation of countries which were robbed of their national independence and democratic institutions. What they expect from America is not miracles, but a consistent strategic idea. "Strategic idea" by no means implies war planning. It means a long-term policy which seeks global order without the risk of global war, and this admittedly involves wearing out the most aggressive expansionism, encouraging by all nonviolent means the diversity and variety

within Soviet dependencies, opening access to truth to the peoples who were thrust into spiritual slavery. Not in spite of, but because of, the fact that the question of how to avoid the danger of global war and how to design a workable disarmament scheme has to have unconditional priority, it is of paramount importance that democratic countries exert peaceful, yet firm and unremitting pressure to advance the gradual and non-explosive disintegration of totalitarian regimes.

That so many local issues almost automatically acquire a global meaning is a fact we cannot escape, and America is clearly incapable of shedding the responsibility for the world order it has helped to shape for many decades. The tendency to escape is sometimes expressed in slogans like "the fight for democracy begins at home." Such slogans might be all right insofar as they express simply the trivial rule that foreign-policy issues may not be used as a pretext for neglecting or disregarding a just and democratic domestic order. Remember, however, that in the second world war the same slogan was launched to explain why the United States should not join the war; in this period the slogan meant: let Hitler swallow the whole of Europe; nazism and Europe are not our business. It matters not what is behind such slogans—the permanent and apparently incurable short-sightedness of big business or the outmoded leftist inhibitions of the liberal lobbies; to say that since we are not saints ourselves, we should forget the oppression elsewhere amounts to saying let us forget the oppression. Well, if social democracy has any meaning, it is precisely not to forget that.

I am one of those who see no reason why they should give credence to the prophets announcing the decline of Western civilization, the ruin of democratic institutions, and the victorious return of barbarity, yet who *do* believe that it is spiritual, rather than economic, recession that threatens us; in other words that the roots of disarray in affluent open societies are in our minds, rather than the price of oil. The

worldwide degradation of educational systems and the uncertainty about their function is a particularly glaring symptom of this disarray. Some aspects of this confusion may be accounted for by our inability to cope with changes which otherwise are obviously positive—the staggering growth of knowledge and the rapid extension of schooling. Yet there are grounds to suspect that much more is involved: a lack of confidence among older generations in the intellectual and moral standards we inherited and, consequently, the loss of a strong will to convey these standards to our successors.

It might sound impertinent when someone like myself, who is only a superficial and casual observer of the American scene, makes comments on this subject, yet similar trends, more or

less advanced, are noticeable in many highly developed areas of the world. When I had the opportunity, for the first time, to make a longer sojourn in the United States in the late sixties, what struck me was that in the then-frequent discussion about the social role of the school nothing seemed to be certain except one thing: it appeared that what school is *not* about is giving the pupils knowledge and intellectual skills. Incidentally, this utter scorn for knowledge and logical abilities, for anything that one can acquire only through long and disciplined work and that cannot be converted into amusement, this used to be called, grotesquely enough, "liberalism," as if liberalism consisted in self-satisfied ignorance or as if it specifically reflected the ideology of spoilt upper-middleclass children. It is consoling, though, that nowadays one hears more and more voices of people who have reached the conclusion that the old-fashioned theory that the task of schools is to teach was not entirely absurd after all.

Yet the roots obviously go deeper than that. There is apparently agreement that the process of spiritual self-mutilation of youth we witnessed in the late sixties is not over, even though its forms have changed, and that it resulted from the collapse of the value system young people had inherited from us. One cannot take satisfaction in the fact that subsequently this breakdown found puerile, absurd, or sometimes barbarian outlets or that it was politically expressed in the pathetic fudge of the New Left that had no solutions and no alternatives to offer. Under the ideological rubbish there was real despair; drugs, false mysticism, and revolutionary daydreams were three main pseudo-cures for a genuine disease which cannot simply be dismissed by pointing out the inefficacy of the medicaments; these were three ways of escaping a world young people felt they did not fit in any longer.

To be sure, no political party or movement may claim to have found a successful therapy for

the moral void; no artificially concocted ideals or mirages can be imposed on people; ultimately the new generations have to seek out ways for themselves to rediscover the meaning-giving life forms. Political movements, except for totalitarian ones, are anyway not capable of providing solutions for metaphysical and religious worries; they ought not to try to expand their ideas into a sort of all-embracing worldview with ready-made catechisms. They must not, nevertheless, evade the question: what went wrong and what is wrong with the set of values which we were brought up with, why have so many people not found these values life-supporting, why are they not ready to die for them? The reply will perhaps not be beyond our reach if we are prepared to confront all the sides of the question. It might turn out that after all most of our traditional values are neither dead nor obsolete, even though they were probably very badly ordered; and that there are viable possibilities besides the withdrawal from the world, putting one's own reason to sleep, or sinking into despair (three aspects of each of three false cures I have just mentioned).

We should admit that we have no prescription for the perfect world, hold no secret of happiness and no clue to the riddle of the universe, and still we are perhaps able to show more modest things and more modest goals which can give meaning to life. In the world as it is, full of misery, hunger, and oppression, this much at least seems to be clear: that neither technical devices alone nor political measures alone are sufficient to bring about the hope for a peaceful and more equitable order. Something more is needed which cannot be a by-product of institutional and technical improvements: reorientation of both individual and collective value attitudes. This is admittedly a generality that does not yet entail any well-defined and feasible proposals. But this generality is good enough to pose a permanent challenge to social democracy if it wants to remain equal to its best tradition and to its very name.

A Response to Conservatism

By Sidney Hook

One of the recurrent phenomena of social life is a periodic swing in thought and attitudes between polar positions. In the arts the movement is from order to revolt, from tradition to experiment, and back again. In education the movement is from a curriculum of the tried and true fundamentals to varied and individually oriented offerings, from the discipline of method to the permissiveness of self-expression. In politics and economics today we are experiencing, at least in ideological emphasis, a reversion from the so-called welfare state to the liberal state of a century ago, from government conceived as an instrument of social progress and justice to government conceived merely as a watchman upholding public order.

The significance and infectious influence of Proposition 13 is currently being widely interpreted as a repudiation of the philosophy of the welfare state, of the role and rule of Big Government, bureaucratic intervention into the economy, over-regulation, and over-centralization. And oddly enough, almost everyone, including former opponents, seems to have become a partisan of Proposition 13, fiercely embattled against government intervention in the economy except, of course, where one's special economic interests are involved. *Herbert Spencer Redivivus* could well be the rallying cry of the ideological spokesmen of the flight from the welfare state.

The most paradoxical feature of the current attack on the welfare state is that it is being conducted under the rallying cry of "freedom." Freedom has become the shibboleth of the libertarian movement and all the prophets of the market-enterprise system. To the extent that this commitment to freedom is sincere, then we Social Democrats, who put freedom first, must meet the challenge posed by this attempt to undermine the precarious achievements of the welfare state, which from our point of view has still far to go to meet the legitimate expectations of free men and women. To us the opposite of the welfare state today is the ill-fare state, indifferent to the remediable ills of its citizens.

To begin with, I for one wish to stress that I hold no brief for the present plethora of controls and regulations on current production and consumption. Many of them are unnecessary. Everyone can furnish his own illustration of bureaucratic ineptitude. As one who believes in the moral right to commit suicide, I myself see no

need for a host of regulations and controls, provided things are properly labelled and identified, that would protect mature persons from the consequences of their own reflective decisions. Nor am I prepared to defend the whole complex of government supports and subsidies, many of which have been adopted at the bidding of special-interest groups who profit most from them. Here, an intelligent approach requires a case-by-case analysis and decision.

But the real target of the conservative and libertarian revival is not this or that particular government program or regulation. It is rather the whole policy of government intervention itself they wish to reverse.

It is one thing to introduce regulation of social and economic behavior in the interest of safety and informed risk. It is quite another thing to presume to dictate to citizens what their life-style should be on the basis of an arrogant and bureaucratic decision as to what is good for them. This is typified in the failure to distinguish between the regulations that prevent the distribution of drugs like thalidomide and those that would prevent the customary use of

"Government and the state are not artificial accretions to the human estate."

cyclamates and saccharin when these are properly labelled. Unfortunately socialism and even social democracy have been identified too much with wholesale regulation and control of human conduct and not enough with the expansion, the enrichment, and the varieties of personal freedom. Yet historically the socialist movement developed out of a protest against the indignities of an industrial system that tied workers to fixed schedules and modes of conduct whose deadening monotony was felt to be incompatible with natural growth and the spontaneity of freely selected vocation.

Common sense would indicate that in part a cost-benefit analysis be undertaken here as in all other situations in which we have to balance good against good when we cannot have both, or bad against worse when we must choose one or the other. But the so-called libertarian ideology rejects this approach because it assumes that the only alternative to existing bad regulation is necessarily no regulation rather than a better or worse regulation.

One would have thought that the regulations that were introduced after the Thalidomide disaster to insure greater safety in drug use would

This article is adapted from an address delivered at the 1978 national convention of Social Democrats, U.S.A.

meet with no principled opposition. But even with respect to these regulations, it has been argued that they are unacceptable because their restrictions resulted in a severe reduction in the development and marketing of new drugs that allegedly could have saved more lives than were blasted by the monstrous deformities of Thalidomide-affected births. When those who hold this view are questioned, they point to the fact that in certain other countries new life-saving drugs were used before they were adopted in this country. But they play down the fact that in every one of these countries, regulatory controls on the marketing of dangerous drugs exist, so that even if one accepted all the factual allegations made, this would be no argument for the abandonment of regulations on drugs but only for more intelligent regulations. To the opponents of regulation, the measure and content of freedom is determined not by specific consequences but by the degree to which the economy is free from any kind of direction or control. This in effect is to make a fetish of the free market, whereas for us the economy is the means by which a whole cluster of other human freedoms are furthered.

Let us grant that one of the major functions of government, even the major function, is to protect freedom. Let us also grant on the basis of logic and historical experience that unlimited government is evil because it countenances no checks on its power to restrict freedom. This is an undeniable truth. But no less undeniable is the truth that the unlimited absence of government would be even more oppressive than unlimited government because that would spell anarchy—the rule of a thousand despots.

Those who speak of government, the agency of organized society, as if it were an inherent foe of human freedom seem to me guilty of a fundamental error. They assume that freedom exists in a state of nature, that it is a natural good that comes with the environment, and that it is surrendered when human beings are organized under laws which necessarily limit some freedom of action. Unless one defines freedom as the right and power to do anything one pleases—which no one can consistently do who becomes a victim of the cruel or malicious action of others—this view of freedom is a myth. There is no human freedom in *rerum natura*: it is an outcome of society, of a free society. Government and the state are not artificial accretions to the human estate. Long ago Aristotle recognized that the individual as a human being, as distinct from a biological organism, could not exist outside of society, that in such a situation he would have to be something more than man (divine) or less than man (animal).

To be sure governments can be restrictive and oppressive, and of such governments we can say that they are best when they govern least. But it

is just as true to say that sometimes government can protect freedoms and not merely threaten them, that sometimes government can expand freedoms rather than restrict them. Whatever freedoms or rights we deem desirable, including the right to privacy, the right "to be left alone," governments and laws are necessary to secure them in a world where others are intent upon violating them. Our own historical experience is evidence of that. It was not the operation of the market that extended and protected the civil rights of the Negroes in the South but the government, and the central government at that. It was not the operation of the market but of the government that guaranteed the rights of the American working class to collective bargaining. Since there can be no government without law, what is true for government is analytically true for law. In a sense *every* law, no matter how wise and enlightened, restricts someone's freedom. As Bentham put it, "every law is contrary to [someone's] liberty," i.e., it is contrary to the liberty or freedom of those who would do what the law forbids them to do and who would interfere with us in the exercise and enjoyment of our rights. The government or the law can only protect our liberty by depriving others of their freedom to act as they please. That is why it is simply false to argue that there is always an inherent opposition between law and freedom, and that the more we have one, the less we have of the other. Would any sensible person argue that the fewer the traffic laws, the greater the freedom motorists would enjoy in our crowded cities and highways to get to their destinations quickly and safely? And even if it were true for motorists, it would certainly not be true for pedestrians.

So long as human beings have conflicting desires, laws are inescapable, regulations are inescapable. Legislation is or should be the process by which we determine what kind of trade-offs we wish to make in the conflict of freedoms, and which are to be given priority.

But the real gravamen of the criticisms of the conservatives against the program of the welfare state is that by its interference with a free-market economy it necessarily limits, coerces, and ultimately destroys human freedom which can flourish only on the basis of a market economy. This is the burden of William Simon's bestselling *A Time for Truth*, enthusiastically endorsed in special introductions to the volume by the high priests of the free-market economy.

I propose that we take as our postulate the desirability of human freedom—which the free-market defenders also stress—and examine the bearings of the market economy on the freedom

not only of those well-endowed with the goods of the world but of those who are not, on the freedom not only of the haves but of the have-nots. Is it true that all, or most, human beings are really free even in an ideally perfect market economy? No action is free unless it is uncoerced, unless it is based upon freely given consent. If I have no food or water or the wherewithal to live for myself and my family, how free am I to exchange my services in bargaining with someone else who has more than enough to live on? What alternatives have I to match his? In such bargaining situations, the individual who has more than he needs can command anything from me, including my freedom, for what sustains life. In an ideal free market, on paper everyone starts from scratch—everyone has equal means, equal needs, equal power. But in the real world, we do not start from scratch, there are great and growing disparities of power between those who have and those who have not that often make the notion of a fair and equal exchange a myth.

Suppose a man says to me: "Your money or your life"—and I give him my money. He is caught and pleads that I gave the money to him freely, that I *had* a choice. According to him, I could have saved my money at the cost of my life. Would anyone else say that I was a free agent? To say so would sound like a macabre joke. Now suppose I am without any means in the free market, and someone offers me work for a bare pittance under humiliating conditions—and there is no other work available or work I can do—am I really a free agent in that case? The situation is such that I am essentially faced with the objective ultimatum: "Your labor or your life," actually "Your labor or your life and the lives of your dependents." The coercion of hunger or the fear of hunger can be just as persuasive, although different, as the coercion of physical violence or its threat. The chief difference is that one is long drawn out, the other sudden and more immediately painful.

The basic point is incontrovertible. In any society, whether it possesses a market economy or a socialized economy, property is power. Whoever owns property has the power to exclude others from the use or possession of what is owned. Whoever owns property in the means of life which I must operate to earn a living—whether the property is owned by the state or an individual—has the legal right to exclude me from its use. Therefore property in things, especially in the social instruments of production, means power, power over human beings. In the very interest of the human freedom that upholders of the free market advocate, we Social Democrats contend that such power must be made socially and morally responsible to those who are affected by its exercise.

This is not the place to demonstrate in detail the multiple ways in which a market economy functions to affect the lives and freedom of those who contract to work within it. (For a recent statement which also traces the deformations of the democratic process resulting from the market economy, see *Politics and Markets* by Charles E. Lindbloom, Basic Books, 1978. See also my "The Social Democratic Prospect", a speech published by Social Democrats, U.S.A., 1976.) Take as a paradigm case the shut-down of a large plant in a community or town in which the plant or factory is the sole or chief supplier of employment. The individual worker in such situations is almost as helpless and unfree as he is in a natural catastrophe, with the normal expectations and life-style of himself and his family destroyed. The decision as to where to work, the conditions under which to work, and the rewards of work seem to be made by forces beyond his control. In the long run, the apologists of the free market argue, the individual will somewhere and somehow be able to find work again. But even if true, what happens until then? Even if true, who pays for the agony and costs of waiting for the market to stabilize itself? If we are to strengthen genuine freedom of choice and even approximate the equality of opportunity which the ideal market economy presupposes, we must do something to provide those who are thrown on the slag heap of the unemployed through no fault of their own, who are willing and able to work, with some alternative possibilities of existence.

After all, as a rule those who close down their enterprises because they are unprofitable, or not as profitable as other kinds of investment, have other means of existence at their disposal. In the very interest of freedom of choice, unemployment insurance and some kind of welfare payments seem required to redress the bargaining balance. But this and similar government interventions into the economy is precisely what the high priests of the market economy deplore.

Let us openly admit that we share with the conservatives a fear of concentrated government power, but on the same grounds we are fearful of large concentrations of private property that can also have oppressive effects. Like them we seek the dispersion of power, but unlike them we seek to avert those gross inequalities of power that unduly influence the political process in these days of multiple mass communication. Even Thomas Jefferson, in the days in which the economy was mainly agricultural and rural, deplored extremes of wealth as subversive of the democratic spirit of a self-governing nation. The only way in which these extremes can be prevented today is through tax policy, through wiser and better government, not absence of government.

There are some concentrations of economic power that can be countered only by the power of government. It was none other than John Stuart Mill who proclaimed that "Society is fully entitled to abrogate or alter any particular right of property which on sufficient consideration it judges stands in the way of the public good." This recognizes that property is a human right but not all forms of it have the same weight and justification in the light of the public good.

**"Equality is a necessary,
but not a sufficient, condition
of any intelligible theory of justice."**

The concept of the public good is a complex and difficult one, hard to define, except in terms of the reflective process in which we balance good against good and right against right. But without the existence and power of government, we could not peacefully determine or enforce the public good. Even those who would limit the power of government to that of watchman of the rules of the road, or to the exercise of police power, are committed to the notion of the public good.

Although it has been denied, I am prepared to show that even on the premises of the watchman theory of government, the public good requires some concern for public welfare, the extent of which depends on public resources. One form of this theory of the state and government professes a belief not only in equality before the law but in equality of opportunity, not equality of outcome. If we take equality of opportunity as an ideal, we must grant that so long as differences in family and home environment exist, as they always will, as well as extreme genetic variations in capacity, absolute or literal equality of opportunity is unattainable. But this is true of all ideals! That absolute health and wisdom are unattainable is no reason for not attempting to become healthier and wiser. The inability to establish absolute equality of opportunity is no justification for ceasing to move towards greater equality of opportunity. If democracy as a way of life implies an equality of concern for all members of the community to develop themselves to their full capacities as human beings, then it is obligatory on the democratic community to move towards greater equality of opportunity in all areas, especially education, housing, health, and employment, required for the development of the individual's best potential. That is why the American slogan of equality of opportunity is one of the most far-reaching principles ever enunciated and expressive of the

ethics of Social Democracy. It is a premise for continuous social reform. And that is why the most influential school of thought in the conservative revival is abandoning the principle of equality of opportunity, and insisting that the only kind of equality which is compatible with a truly liberal society is one in which there is simply and only equality before the law.

In this view there is no such thing as "social justice" but only conflicting claims equally justified. Equality of opportunity is "a wholly illusory ideal." Justice is procedural, the impartial application of a rule or principle to all who fall under it regardless of the consequences of the rule.

There is one obvious and fatal flaw in any conception of justice that makes it merely procedural—the impartial application of a rule. It cannot distinguish between the just and unjust rules and cannot grasp the difference in significance between the statement that "justice consists in treating all persons in the same or relevantly similar circumstances equally" and the statement "justice consists in mistreating all persons in the same or relevantly similar circumstances equally." Equality is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition of any intelligible theory of justice. Over and above formal legal equality, the just law must concern itself with the effects of law on human weal and woe. What modern-day conservatism fails to realize is that the pursuit of justice can be distinguished from, but ultimately not separated from, the pursuit of happiness or human welfare. No one in the world is really a self-made man or woman. When we consider what we owe to the community—our language without which there could be no thought, our skills that are dependent upon the cumulative traditions forged by generations of early pioneers, our knowledge most of which we have inherited, our safety, health, and even our goods possessed not only in virtue of our own efforts but because of the activities and forbearances of others—we become conscious of a debt that cannot be discharged if we are indifferent to the fate of our fellows. Concern for the public welfare does not require self-sacrifice but the wisdom of common sense that recognizes the obligation of unpaid debts and the dictates of enlightened self-interest.

As if this were not confusion enough, there has developed, out of inability to see how differences among men can be resolved by rational moral principles, a call for a return to transcendental religion. It is alleged that all our social problems and evils are a consequence of failure to grasp the supernatural truths concerning God's existence and his supreme goodness as well as power. The failure of moral nerve in

the West and the cult of irresponsibility and hedonistic abandon, with all their degrading side effects, are attributed to the loss of religious faith. We are told that a politics oriented towards man and the fulfillment of his needs on this earth can end only in the worship of Caesar.

With the profoundest respect for the great moral figure of our time who has recently articulated this point of view, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, we must repudiate it on many grounds. First of all, it is irrelevant to the basic issues that divide the free world from its chief totalitarian enemy. Those issues are rooted in freedom of choice. In a free and open society, freedom of religion is central to be sure, but freedom of religion means not only the right to worship God according to one's conscience, but the right not to worship, the right to believe in one, many, or no Gods.

Secondly, it is historically false to assert that religious faith is necessarily on the side of a free human society. The totalitarianism of the Soviet Union and of the fascist states both in the past and present has had its religious defenders. Hewlett Johnson, the red Dean of Canterbury, and Karl Barth, the existentialist theologian, were ardent defenders of Stalin.

Thirdly, it is logically false to make any kind of religious belief the basis of human morality because men build their gods in their own moral image. What makes an action good or bad is not any divine command but the intrinsic nature of the act and its consequences for human weal and woe. It is not true that morality logically depends

on religion. It is the other way around. We must first know what the good is before we seek its alleged source.

Finally, to introduce religious faith as a necessary condition of a humane society is divisive. We can rally mankind around a program of autonomous human rights. In a world of conflicting religions in which Christians are a minority, in a world of conflicting faiths even among Christians, it is wishful thinking to expect agreement on any transcendental dogmas. If we can agree and unite on the basis of acceptance of universal human rights, we do not have to agree on their religious or philosophical justifications.

As Social Democrats we yield to none in the cause of freedom—whether moral or political. And we repudiate as unfounded, indeed untrue, the conservative view that we need the unconscious help either of a pure market economy or a Supreme Being to realize that freedom in our institutions. It is true that we cannot properly plan for an entire society. Nor can we rebuild any aspects of it without regard for human history and the limitations of human nature and power. It is true that human reason is neither allpowerful nor infallible. But these truths are no grounds to forego the use of intelligence and the self-corrective methods of experience in trying to cope with the problems of our economy—the chief of which are to provide full employment at an adequate wage level, economic growth, and minimal inflation.

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